

November 27, 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR

SUBJECT: Procedures Relating to Contacts with News Media Representatives

On October 31 I suggested in the Secretary's staff meeting certain procedures for the reporting of interviews with newsmen in the Department of State. You may recall that in outlining the procedure, I placed great emphasis on two points:

First, that it is essential both to the public and the government that there be the fullest possible dialogue between policy officials and newsmen, and that it is the policy of the Department, as interpreted and carried out by the Bureau of Public Affairs, to encourage this dialogue, not to inhibit it.

Second, that there were some specific steps that the suggested procedure explicitly was not designed to include, namely the requiring of advance permission for press interviews or contacts, the presence of a public affairs adviser or other third party at such interviews, or the reporting of the substance of the interviews.

The procedure was confined to one step: that officials who grant interviews in the Department indicate to the Bureau of Public Affairs, after the event, the fact that an interview took place, the name of the correspondent and his organization and the general subject discussed. I added that such a procedure was not designed to introduce any inhibition in the relations between Department officers and correspondents. It is my understanding that the new procedures were explained by you to Department officials in this context, and only this context. It is also my understanding that officers of the Department of State have not allowed this simple procedure to reduce in any way their normal patterns of relations with the press.

Nevertheless, the procedure has come under fire in the press and on the air in a manner that calls for clarification.

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For one thing, the procedures have in many instances been misrepresented in the press as calling for the very stringencies that, were in fact, specifically mentioned as unwanted and undesirable. Beyond that, the procedure has been criticized as one that by its very nature is certain to work at least a subtle inhibition on officials who are approached by news correspondents.

It is difficult to believe that men of the intelligence and judgment required to formulate and carry out policies, to negotiate with representatives of other governments are likely to be unable or unwilling to exercise that same judgment and intelligence in explaining those policies to the public, and I am grateful to the many officials in the Department who have taken pains to emphasize to me that there has not been, and would not be, any retrenchment of relations with newsmen as a result of the reporting procedure.

My own check on this question with officers of the Department and several members of the press demonstrates that no such retrenchment has occurred.

A point of important principle is involved. In the conduct of the public business for which he is responsible, the Secretary of course has a right to know what his policy officers are doing in this regard; whether, for example, they are paying sufficient attention to this important aspect of foreign affairs. It is equally necessary that the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, who is charged by the Secretary of State with responsibility for informing the public, has a right to know and to examine the flow and pattern of relations between the Department and the communications media. It is obvious that any attempt to build a better, speedier and increasingly forthcoming program of information requires at least a rudimentary sense of the pattern of the Department's relations with the press. Resources for this function are limited and must be utilized with efficiency.

There need be no apology for a procedure designed to provide such information, or otherwise to serve the national interest as it is related to information.

I am concerned, however, about the manner in which this matter has been discussed in the press and in other communications channels and the serious misimpression that is being

conveyed

conveyed about the Department's attitude toward public information. That attitude, simply put, is that there must be a steady and forthcoming flow of information and assessment to the public, through the press as well as other channels, within the acceptable bounds of responsible judgment and national security. This requires contact between policy officials and newsmen.

In the recent four weeks of crisis, the reporting procedure has usefully served the purposes and the principles described above. If it becomes necessary or advisable, the reporting procedure will be reinstated. Meanwhile, on the authority of the Secretary of State, the Bureau of Public Affairs is suspending the reporting procedure. Please convey the full substance of this memo to your personnel. Again, my thanks for your cooperation.

Robert Manning